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Foundation

Element 2

Wordcount (2933)

Contemporary R&B is a combination of Rhythm and Blues and parts of other genres such as pop, soul and funk music. In its current form it mostly takes parts of Hip Hop to form a hybrid between traditional R&B and current Hip Hop. Successful songs in this genre also lean towards Pop in terms of its structure and time signature, more on the 100BPM+ end of the R&B scale and sometimes closer to the 140BPM in which Hip Hop can sit in. The combination of all these features brings about a song that is emotive but also energetic.

The song Thank u, Next by Ariana Grande was produced as a collaboration between Social House & TBHits. The BPM is at 107. The two separate parts of the hybrid genre can be clearly identified within the first 20 seconds of the song with the emotive electric piano opening the song to be joined with the sliding bass and percussive elements. The song follows a simple structure similar to one found in most Pop songs with a 4 bar intro and groups of 8 bar verses, pre-choruses and choruses only varying after the second chorus with a 4 bar B section to that chorus followed by a 16 bar verse an 8 bar chorus with a 8 bar outro. This structure gives an air of predictability with only slight variations to each part to keep the listener engaged but not introduce anything too foreign as to throw them off.

Looking at another song within this genre of Contemporary R&B we can see similar features. Yummy by Justin Bieber was produced by Poo Bear, Kid Culture and Sasha Sirota. The BPM is at 146 Instantly you can hear the similarity between the two tracks with the emotive electric piano. The Hip Hop element can be identified as soon as the first chorus comes in, which is before the first verse (something that is very common in pop songs) The structure is also similar with the difference of the verse and pre-chorus being 4 bars each and the chorus being 8 bars almost as if to mirror the feel of the two previous sections. The chorus being at the start of the song helps with familiarity as by the time the chorus comes again, in its more natural place, the listener already knows the feel and most of the lyrics of the song.

By looking at the way these two songs are structured, in my song Switch, I decided to go with a short intro similar to Yummy with 8 bar verses and pre-choruses like Thank u, Next. This was to have the familiarity and structure of the more pop elements of both tracks. In order to add a bit of variation I added a 2 bar section, similar to a Hook to lead into the chorus. One of the ideas behind this was to help transition into the chorus without it feeling too much the same as every other part. The other idea was to make this song suitable for online mediums, specifically TikTok.

Both of these songs found big success on the social media platform TikTok with challenges surrounding them. This helped boost the popularity of the songs and also is a common thing songwriters and producers strive to achieve with their music. The important part of creating a song to work on a platform such as TikTok is to understand how content works well on the site. 15 seconds is the key timing for a song to do well "Listen to the whole track in 15-second segments until you land upon the hook that'll capture the attention of your audience." (Callaghan, 2019) So the small break before the chorus was created as a way to hook the audience and with the lyrics "Taking my time don't need you, can't tell me what to do coz I,

Switch” it acts as a canvas for creators on the platform to work from when creating viral challenges for the song.

Contemporary R&B gets its groove from Hip Hop so drums are an extremely important part of the song. Breaking down Thank u, Next, reveals the drums have many different layers to them. The main two components are the backbeat groove of the kick and drum and the excitable percussive grooves. The backbeat is very common in most music these days but the excitable percussion is quite unique to songs that draw elements or influence from Hip Hop. The reasoning behind this is simple as the producers state they “added a little bit of percussion to kinda, you know, spice it up a little bit, give it some energy, some life” (The Making Of Ariana Grande's "thank u, next" With Social House & TBHits | Deconstructed, 2019) Drawing inspiration from this, I added some percussive loops consisting of hi-hats, congas, shakers and a steel drum to help drive it all and blend it into the track. This gave the track a bit more of a bouncy feel to it, especially in the chorus, right after the comparatively empty 2 bar hook.

When it came to mixing the song I focused more on Thank u, Next as it had a female vocalist just like my song. Since I knew I was working with a higher frequency voice I placed a dip at around 1.2kHz on the beat in order to give the vocals more space to work with. This was helpful especially in stopping the steel drums from clashing with the vocals and stopped any crowding. From listening to my reference track I noticed the vocals were also very present around the 4-5kHz range so I applied a boost there. After doing this I had noticed that Yummy also had similar sounding vocals despite it being sung by a male vocalist. It seems the 4-5kHz boost is common in songs where the vocals need to have a strong presence in the track, which is what this genre typically has.

With the master of the track, I did not have to do much to make my song sound similar to my reference tracks. I did notice however, that my track was significantly quieter than the references. Since this song would most likely end up on streaming services as well I found that “Spotify recommend your peak level should be no higher than -2 dBTP if the loudness is above -14 LUFS” (Shepherd, 2020) in order to avoid any clipping as it uses a limiter. Knowing this I used a Loudness Meter on the end of my master chain and added my own Glue Compressor and Limiter in order to manage the loudness of the track. I found using a long attack, sort release and a ratio of 2:1, resulted in very smooth compression and I ended up with a True Peak of -2.3dB and a LUFS of -13.5.

The second track I analysed falls into the genre of Bedroom Pop or Lo-fi Pop. This genre has risen to popularity recently and can be simplified to Pop music using lo-fi aesthetics and effects. “lo-fi effects are generally characteristics that have made the process of recording and its product appreciably imperfect” (Harper, 2014) which in a digital world is an easily achievable feat. Things like vinyl noise, microtonal sounds and bit crushed distortion are key characteristics of this genre. These songs tend to be light sounding with a slightly depressing feel to them and can also be described as DIY music.

I looked to the song Telepatia by Kali Uchis, produced by Tainy, Lara and Albert Hype as my reference for this. When looking at the structure of the song it is very free flowing. It starts off with an instrumental intro into the first chorus. Following this is a quite common verse/chorus/verse/chorus structure, however, it is not obvious that the song starts with the chorus until you loop back to it. This kind of ambiguous structure is quite common in Lo-fi music, where the aim of the song is to create a chilled vibe rather obviously sound like a fully developed song. It's this ambiguity along with the Lo-fi effects/aesthetics which contributes to its other name of DIY music.

I looked at another song within the DIY music spectrum, See You Again by Tyler, The Creator ft Kali Uchis produced by Tyler, as it has Hip Hop elements in it that I wanted to include in my song. The song also follows a similar freeform structure with a rap verse as its second verse.

Taking the structures in my mind I decided on an instrumental intro with a rap in the bridge in my song Burn Out. I tried to keep to the freeform structure. To do this I kept the drums and guitar the same throughout the whole song, minus the bridge. The bridge I made quite different to the rest of the song to try and create the slightly depressing feel that the genre can create.

The biggest part of this genre is not structure, but as previously mentioned, the lo-fi effects. I used a plugin by XLN Audio called RC-20 Retro Color which I had purchased after doing some research into lo-fi effects. This plugin is very popular with producers who want to create an analog or lo-fi feel to parts of their tracks. I used the plugin in various parts of the mix but most importantly I used it on the guitar and drums. As I did not have a real drum set or guitar to hand, I needed it in order to make the drum and guitar samples I used sound as if they were recorded to tape instead of sampled within a Digital Audio Workstation. I added a cassette tape noise to the drums with some extra reverb to make it sound as if it was recorded in a live studio instead of programmed. On the guitar sample I wanted to emulate a guitar amp sound so I added some distortion and noise to that.

The next thing I wanted to accomplish was making the vocals feel as if they were recorded in a bedroom on a minimal set up. This was achieved in the recording process. When recording the vocals I deliberately had the gain higher than normal and sung and rapped very close to the mic. With this I was able to get an amateur sounding recording that I could manipulate to my liking. Listening to Telepatia I noticed the vocals were very light and airy. To emulate this, I used a low cut in the EQ where I heard the main body of my vocals. This allowed me to remove the bassy sound my voice, as a male vocalist, produces. With the addition of some reverb and a doubler I created in Ableton, using a delay with the right side delayed further than the right and a saturator, I was able to create very wide and airy sounding vocals.

The last thing I wanted to achieve in the mix was a microtonal sound. I achieved this in the outro vocals where I created a call and response. The call had vocals mixed the same as the rest of the track. The response was pitched using a plug in called OVOX by Waves. I had the vocals doubled in the plugin and the double was pitched a 5 semitones and 20 cents up and down to create a microtonal chord with the vocals. I used the same mastering process as my first track

to get the LUFS and dBTP to an acceptable level for streaming platforms but I also used the RC-20 plug in again to add slight pitch shifts over time so that track never stays completely in one key to further amplify the microtonal feel.

Dance music is a very broad genre that could be simplified as music to be played within a club. Dance and Pop have been combined together into various subgenres. This made things difficult when trying to categorise my next reference track. I settled on the genre of Dance-Pop as it is so varied in the songs that can be found within it. The main characteristics of Dance-Pop are upbeat, pop structure, emphasis on grooves and polished production.

The third reference track I used was Inhale by Duke Dumont and Ebenezer, produced by Duke Dumont. The song starts with a light intro void of percussion, which is quite common in pop music. Once the first verse kicks in it is very easy to pick up on the groove presented by the drums, bass and guitar. The song then goes on to follow a simple pop structure with verse, pre-chorus, chorus and bridge sections in their expected place. The production uses very simple instrumentation throughout it, varying the track by dropping out and including instruments in different sections of the track. In my opinion, the simple instrumentation helps to create the polished feel of the production as with less instruments the producer is able to make every sound have its own space to breathe and have individual impact on the overall track.

The second track I referenced was Juice by Young Franco ft Pell, produced by Young Franco. This song leans more towards the electro and dance side of the genre. The first thing I noticed was again the simplistic production, giving every part of the track its own separate space to have impact. The song also starts with a minimalist intro into its verse. The structure is different in that it does not have a pre-chorus but instead has an interlude section right after the chorus, kind of like a B section to the chorus itself. This is something I have noticed in pop music, the verse and chorus are always separated with another section to help distinguish the chorus from the rest of the song.

With all this in mind, in my song Stereo Love, I wanted to focus on the groove with the drums and the bass. Minimalist production was another main focus of mine so I decided to keep it as simple as I can make it. I used a longer intro to help emphasise the groove at the start as I felt it was right for the track. The intro features only a few vocals, again to keep the intro simple but also it works the same as putting the chorus at the start of the song so the listener is familiar with the chorus concept before the chorus actually takes place. The chorus replaces vocals with the slightly bigger production including the synths. I decided against putting vocals in the chorus as it felt too complicated with them and took up the same space as the synths.

When listening to Inhale, I noticed the pre-chorus vocals are more spacious than the verse vocals. There was a wider reverb placed on those vocals to take up the space that was missing with most of the instruments dropping out. So with my track I decided to use a wider reverb on a bus channel, as well as my previously described doubler to help take up space. I also chopped the bass to take out some of the notes so the groove is still able to be felt.

As modern Dance music takes its roots from Disco, I decided to research into how disco has influenced modern dance in order to see how I can incorporate elements from this genre. Finding that “Disco is a genre of dance music blending soul, funk, rhythm and blues, and pop that emerged during the late 1960's and early 70's in New York City. It is characterized by heavy bass lines, strong beats, and the incorporation of early electronic instruments like the synthesizer.” (White, 2015) I decided to add a bit of a funk feel with some synth stabs and guitar licks. The fourth beat of each bar includes a stab which along with the already prominent groove adds a modern disco feel to the track.

The last thing I needed to accomplish was a polished production feel. I used an auto tune on the vocals to make sure they were in tune and a cut below where the indeed bassy sounds of the vocals sat (around 230 Hz). This allowed space for the instruments that belonged at the lower frequencies, bass and kick, to breathe. I also tuned the kick to the first note of the bass groove in order to make it fit into the mix better. Sidechaining was not used to mix the bass and kick together as I felt the four to the floor kick drum would interrupt the bass groove if used. I found that “Inverted Equalization is a great helper, as you can cut holes in both instruments that you fill with the other one.” (Gateway, 2019) So I instead decided to use EQ to boost the prominent frequencies of one and to subtract that frequency from the other and vice versa. The bass was cut at 60Hz and lowered at 250 and 600Hz and boosted at 120 and 400Hz with the opposite applied to the kick.

I found panning to be an effective method to use with the stabs and guitars as they sat at similar frequencies. I decided upon this after listening to how wide the mix in Inhale was. The panning scale on Ableton, my DAW of choice, goes from 0-50. I found panning sounds at around 25 left or right allowed clashing sounds to steer clear of each other but not be a hard pan. Panning one stab left and the other right allowed a very nice call and response type feel to them to add a bit of variety to the track.

With the master I leant more towards how Inhale was processed. Juice had a warmer sound and I wanted a very bright sounding mix. I started by adding a boost at 5KHz knowing this is the upper end of our most sensitive part of hearing. Any lower and I knew the listener would focus on that frequency and the aim was to enhance not draw focus. Next was an OTT compressor, using Xfer OTT. I used this to have the higher and lower frequencies more prominent in the mix than the mid. Knowing the mid frequencies of my track 500Hz-4KHz would contribute to a warmer mix, I applied downwards compression to those and upwards compression to the lows and highs (more so with the highs). Finishing this up with a glue compressor and limiter, I was able to get my track at the correct level for streaming services.

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